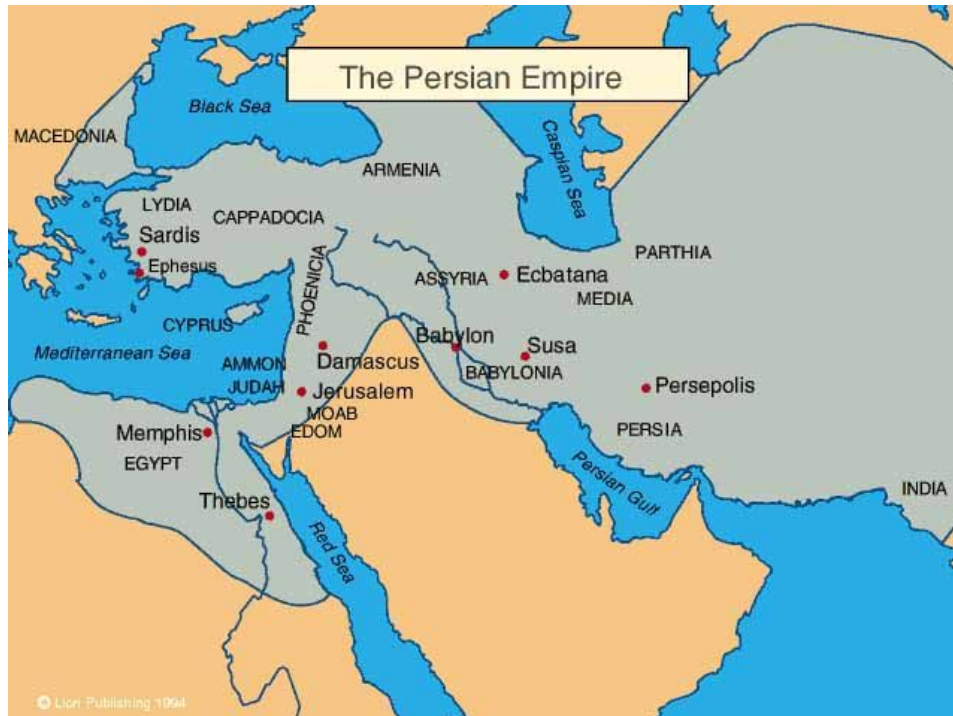


Persian Wars

The Persian Wars were a series of wars fought between the Persians and the Greeks from 492 BC to 449 BC.

The Persian Empire was the largest and most powerful empire in the world at the time of the Persian Wars. They controlled land that stretched from Egypt all the way to India.



The Greeks were made up of a number of independent city-states such as Sparta and Athens. Typically these city-states fought each other, but they united to fight against the Persians.

The Ionians were Greeks that lived along the coast of Turkey and had traded heavily with the Athenians. They were conquered by the Persians. When the Ionians decided to revolt against the Persians who they felt no nationalistic ties to, they asked Athens and other Greek cities for help. The other Greek cities sent ships and weapons, but were quickly defeated by the Persians who completely outnumbered and outgunned them.



The Persians didn't like this and decided to conquer the rest of the Greek cities in order to keep them under control. Darius I, King of Persia, sent a final envoy to the Greeks in 491 BC asking them to submit to the Persian - the Greeks executed the Persian messengers. Darius gathered a vast army of soldiers that outnumbered any army the Greeks could muster. They boarded the Persian fleet and headed to Greece.

Battle of Marathon-- The Persian fleet landed at the Bay of Marathon, about 25 miles from the city of Athens. The Persians had a lot more soldiers (90,000 men with 2,000 cavalry). The Athenians had somewhere between 10,000-20,000 men between the different city-states. The Persians had long-distance archers while the Greeks had heavily armored heavy infantry of hoplites with their large round shields, spears and swords, and organised in a solid line or phalanx where each man's shield protected both himself and his neighbour in a wall of bronze. The Persian were well-trained, disciplined and seasoned soldiers, the Greeks had a quickly pulled together group of farmers, merchants and occasional soldiers. Nevertheless, the Persians underestimated the fighting capability of the Greeks and the flexibility of the heavily armed phalanx - the light Persian arrows bounced off the Greek's shields. The fact that the Greeks had homefield geographic knowledge of the mountain passes as Marathon gave them a distinct advantage - luring the Persians into the narrow passes and hailing spears from the heights. The army of Greeks routed the Persian army killing around 6,000 Persians and only losing 192 Greeks. After the battle, the Athenian army ran the 25 miles back to Athens in order to prevent the Persians from attacking the city. This is the origin of the Marathon running race.

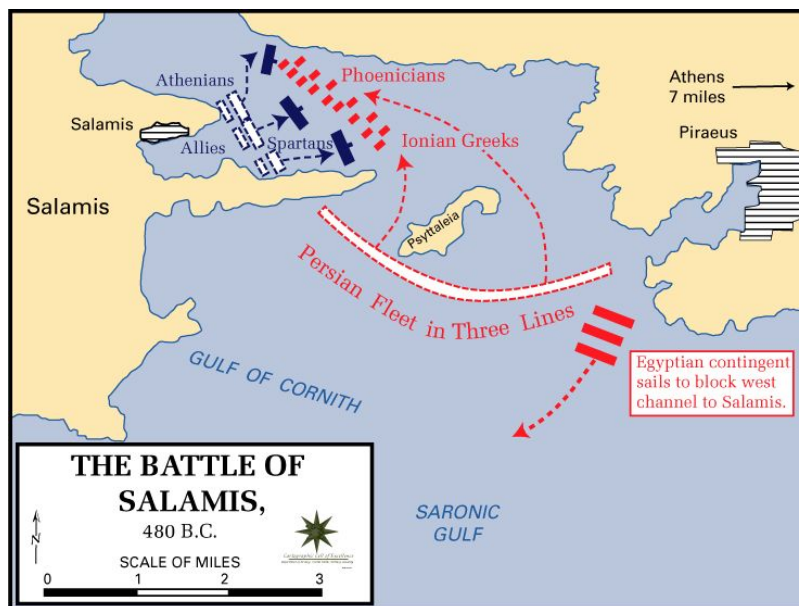


Battle of Thermopylae--- The Greeks put together a small force, led by the Spartan King Leonidas I and 300 Spartans. They decided to meet the Persians at a narrow pass in the mountains called Thermopylae. The Greeks held off the Persians killing thousands, until the Persians found a way around the mountains and got behind the Greeks. King Leonidas told most of his troops to flee, but stayed behind with a small force including his 300 Spartans in order to allow the rest of the Greek army to escape. The Spartans fought to the death, killing as many Persians as they could.

Battle of Salamis--- The Persian army continued to march on Greece. When they arrived at the city of Athens, they found it deserted. The people of Athens had fled to the island of Salamis off the coast of Athens where they the Athenians had hidden their fleet of a newly designed ship called the trireme. The trireme was a small, highly maneuverable ship with 300 oarsmen and a metal prow perfect for ramming. It could not hold many soldiers so the boat itself was the weapon. The bronze prow would strike another boat at water level and sink it.



The Athenians lured the much larger Persian barges into the narrow channel between Athens and Salamis. Once the Persian ships were in the channel. The Athenian triremes struck from all around like piranhas - the Persians could not maneuver their boats and were sunk. They soundly defeated the Persians causing Xerxes to retreat back to Persia.



Result: The combined Greek victory over the Persians made them now a dominant force in the eastern Mediterranean. The Athenians who masterminded the victory at Salamis created the Delian League - a protective alliance among Greeks to build a navy of triremes against the threat of a future Persian invasion which never happened. The Persians realized that the Greeks were not worth another invasion and had larger issues politically at home. The Greeks began to align themselves between the two superpowers of the Persian War - the Spartans and the Greeks - and a conflict would eventually happen between the two.